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ABSTRACT

At the University of Sydney (Australia) the undergraduate dropout rate is about 8 percent, with a rate of 10 percent for freshmen. The proportion is unevenly distributed across subject areas, with that in the arts and economics higher than that in the professional schools. The present study concentrates on the group of students who withdraw from courses for reasons other than academic failure. A questionnaire was distributed to all students withdrawing during 1973 and 1974, and a series of rating scales for their university experiences was included. The intent was to discover if there are any systematic differences between subpopulations of withdrawing students, analyzed on the basis of their reasons for withdrawing, time of withdrawal, sex, or program year. (MSE)

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A STUDY OF DISCONTINUATION IN THE UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY

Clive Williams and Geoffrey Ainsworth.

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INTRODUCTION

Each year numbers of university students discontinue their courses. The numbers involved, in fact, are quite large and represent, in the University of Sydney, about 8% of the undergraduate enrolment. The proportion of first year students discontinuing is about 10%, but this proportion is not evenly distributed across all faculties, the proportion in Arts and Economics being higher and that in the professional faculties lower.

Little information has been gathered on the nature of discontinuers and the reasons for their discontinuations. From time to time statements are made by various persons, ranging from prominent university staff to leading public figures, about "wastage" which occurs as a result of so many students "dropping out". Since the gaining of a place in a university course of one's choice has become more competitive and many applicants are unsuccessful with their applications, there has been increasing pressure on those who are admitted not to "waste" their opportunities. This pressure has made a decision to discontinue more difficult to make for the student and less acceptable to the community. The community's attitude to education in Australia very much reflects the conveyor-belt philosophy. Students hop on the education conveyor-belt and are expected to stay on until it reaches its destination. A decision to get off the conveyor-belt at any unscheduled point is frowned upon. The fact

remains that many students do choose to get off and before any sweeping judgements are made about whether or not this is a good or bad thing we need more information about the factors leading to their decisions.

The term "drop-out" is often used to describe students who do not proceed with their courses. This term is somewhat loosely used and unfortunately often is used in a derogatory sense. There are really three groups of persons who "drop out". First, those who either decide not to continue or are prevented from continuing their courses because of academic failure, second, those successful students who choose not to re-enrol in their courses, and third, those students who voluntarily withdraw from their courses during the academic year. Most of the studies relating to "drop-outs" include all three groups since interest has largely been focused on graduation rates, and those who do not proceed with their studies are therefore all lumped together. Summerskill (1962, 1968) in his survey of the United States scene has taken this approach as has Miller (1970) in his review of higher education in Australia, England and the U.S.A.

The interest in this study, however, is solely in the third group - those who withdraw during the academic year. The information relating to this specific group is scarce indeed, but recently three studies in Australia have focused on this group. Lawrence (1972),

studied first year students at Monash University who discontinued between 14.4.72 and 1.9.72. Fifty-five student responses were analysed and Lawrence demonstrated that the discontinuers did not constitute a homogenous group. He did not, however, compare them with continuing students.

At Adelaide University Rump and Greet (1975) conducted a survey of all students who voluntarily withdrew before 31st July. Their aim was to have these students complete a questionnaire and also to complete a number of psychological and educational tests. However, their response rate was only about one-third and interpretation of their results is accordingly open to question. The chief findings from this study were that part-time students had particular difficulties and discontinued at a rate higher than full-time students, and that first year and later year students differed in the reasons for their discontinuations. Both these findings are recorded in this present study.

Susan Hayes (1973) conducted a study of 170 students who voluntarily withdrew from their courses at the University of New South Wales. Hayes identified five groups of discontinuers (she used the term "drop-out" which we have chosen not to use). Her five groups were described as:

Conformists: who left university because of external circumstances but who accepted the goals of university

education and the means of achieving them;

Innovators: who left university to achieve personal goals via some other means;

Ritualists: who accepted the means but not the goals and tended to be at university because of external pressures;

Retreatists: who were keen to graduate but were unable to achieve their goals because of emotional or academic difficulties and resolved their conflicts by rejecting both goals and means; and

Rebels: who rejected goals associated with university education and subsequent careers and aspired to new goals of their own.

In addition to examining the nature of the drop-outs, Hayes compared them with a matched sample of continuing students she labelled "persisters" and established numbers of differences between the groups.

There is no reason to believe that factors leading to discontinuation in one institution necessarily apply to another. There may be factors peculiar to an institution itself which significantly affect students' decisions and these factors need to be discovered. Apart from any generalities which may be established from research relating

to discontinuation the topic should be a subject of internal institutional research since it is each institution's responsibility to seek information relating to its own students. This study sets out to do this for the University of Sydney.

OUTLINE OF STUDY

It was decided to conduct a questionnaire survey of all students who discontinued their courses at the University of Sydney in 1973. A questionnaire was constructed for the purpose (See Appendix A). The questionnaire included items relating to respondents' domicile, family member's university attendance, travelling time, reasons for discontinuing and the conditions leading up to the decision to discontinue. In addition a series of ratings about their university experience was included. These ratings as well as some of the questions had been used in an earlier study involving students in Geography (See Williams 1975). The responses of the Geography students were available as a reference group with which the responses of the discontinuers could be compared.

Questionnaires were sent to all persons who discontinued their enrolments. The distribution of the questionnaires was undertaken by the staff of the Information and Enrolments Office as soon as notification of discontinuation was received. Names and addresses of those receiving the questionnaires were forwarded to the Student Counselling Service so that non-respondents could be followed up. Two follow-up letters were prepared and these were despatched by the Student Counselling Service 4 weeks and 7 weeks after the initial request if no reply had been received. Another copy of the questionnaire was included in the second follow-up letter. This procedure was also adopted in

1974. The response rate was 71.3% in 1973 and 67.1% in 1974.

The first few weeks of the academic year are often quite confusing to students. Many students change their minds about their choice of subjects and amend their enrolment to suit their intentions. Others decide that they do not wish to stay at university at all, and such decisions are reached for a variety of reasons. Persons in this category cancel their enrolments altogether. For example in 1975 in the Faculty of Engineering 55 students discontinued during first year, but 29 of these did so during the first week. Such persons are unlikely to be committed to a course and their experience of university is minimal. For the purpose of this survey it was decided to contact only those students who discontinued after the third week of first term. By this means it was felt that all respondents would have sufficient contact with the university to form some judgements about it and to experience consistent reactions. Moreover, each would have demonstrated a modicum of commitment to his/her chosen course.

Initially the intention was to carry out the survey for 1973 only. However, at the end of 1973 the Australian Government abolished university fees and it was decided to continue the survey through 1974 in order to see if the abolition of fees made any difference to discontinuation rates or to reasons for discontinuing. The questionnaire used in 1974 varied slightly from that used in 1973 since the 1973

responses indicated that some questions needed to be altered slightly to ensure clarity of meaning e.g. by changing the verb tense from present to past. In such cases the rewording did not change the intent of the question and does not prevent responses for the two years being combined.

The next three sections of this Report outline the main findings of the survey. Those who do not wish to study these findings in detail may prefer to proceed straight to Section 6, Discussion.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SUB-POPULATIONS

This section of the report addresses itself to discovering whether there are any systematic differences between sub-populations of discontinuers, chosen on the basis of:

i) Reason for discontinuation.

ii) Time of discontinuation (first term/later).

iii) Sex of discontinuer.

iv) Year of course (1st year/later).

1. REASON FOR DISCONTINUATION

The following results refer to the total sample of discontinuers (N=858). 7.1% indicated financial problems as the main reason for discontinuing, 9.2% indicated illness, 30.8% indicated not coping, 17.9% indicated changed life goals, 27.6% indicated "other" reasons and 7.4% indicated more than one of the above alternatives.

For ease of reference these sub-groups will be referred to as F (financial reasons), I (illness), N (not coping) L (changed life goals), and O (other). The distribution of respondents across groups was almost identical for the two years 1973 and 1974 and, therefore, responses for the two years have been combined. Specific reasons offered by those who came into the 'other' category were extremely varied. They included such reasons as pregnancy, demands of employ-

ment, coupled with the University's inadequate provision for part-time studies, lack of child care facilities, failure to gain course of first preference and other dissatisfactions with courses.

In the analyses which follow, the reasons for discontinuation are cross-tabulated with other variables and the statistical significance of the frequencies determined. The method of statistical analysis used was chi-square (χ^2) and the level of significance adopted was the .05 level. Details of frequencies or percentages will not be reported unless the differences between them are statistically significant, and the percentage is based on a minimum frequency of 15.

These analyses refer to frequencies only. Data on continuous variables are found in the following section where comparisons are also made with a reference group of continuing students.

a) *Reason and Sex*

There was no significant difference between the sexes in the proportions choosing one reason for discontinuation rather than another.

b) *Reason and Faculty*

i) Whereas the F group constituted 7.1% of the total, 23.1% of Agriculture discontinuers were in this category.

ii) There were only minor fluctuations across faculties in the proportions discontinuing through illness.

iii) 52.9% of Dentistry (9 out of 17 cases), 50% of Pharmacy, 42.9% of Social Work and 41% of Engineering students discontinued because they were not coping; these were the highest percentages. The lowest percentage came from Medicine - 16.7%.

iv) The two highest rates of discontinuation for reasons of changed life goals were in Architecture (36.8%, - 7 out of 19 cases) and Medicine (29.2%). The lowest rates were Pharmacy (9.1%) and Economics (13.3%).

v) Discontinuations due to 'other' reasons were fairly evenly spread.

c) *Reason and Full-time or Part-time Status*

Students' reasons for discontinuation did not differ significantly according to Full-time or Part-time status.

d) *Reason and Year Status*

Reason for discontinuation was cross-tabulated with three categories of year status - 1st year, 2nd year and later years. Second year discontinuers had the lowest rate of discontinuation for financial reasons. Discontinuation for illness reasons increased with increasing year status. Second year had the highest and later years the lowest rates of discontinuation for reasons of not coping. The incidence of changed life goals decreased with increasing year status.

e) *Reason and Obtaining First Faculty Preference*

Whether or not a student entered the faculty of his first preference did not significantly affect the reason for discontinuation.

f) *Reason and Residence*

The lowest rates of discontinuation for financial reasons occurred for people living in their own home (3.9%) or with their parents (4.8%), the highest for those in rented accommodation (12.7%). Those living in their own home had the highest rate of discontinuation due to illness (14.5%). 58.8% of people living in private board discontinued for reasons of not coping, (10 out of 17 cases), while only 16.7% of people in colleges discontinued for that reason. The lowest rate of discontinuation due to changed life goals occurred for people living in their own home (7.9%) and the highest for those living in college (33.3%). 47.4% of those living in their own home discontinued for 'other' reasons.

g) *Reason and Whether Members of the Discontinuer's Immediate Family had Attended University*

Attendance of immediate family at university was not shown to be related to reasons for discontinuation.

h) *Reason and Factors which led to the Students' Discontinuation*

i) "I had little interest in the subjects I was studying" - overall 31.6% of discontinuers had little interest in the subjects they were studying. Between the groups, however, there were large differences - F and I discontinuers had low rates of agreement with the statement (10% and 14.1% respectively) while L and N groups had high rates (44.7% and 37.4% respectively).

ii) "I was disappointed with the intellectual atmosphere at University" Overall 22.4% of discontinuers were disappointed with the intellectual atmosphere. The F (5%) and I (9.0%) groups had lower rates of disappointment than the L (29.6%) and N (24.8%) groups.

iii) "I did not feel accepted by other students" - Overall 8.1% of discontinuers did not feel accepted. The incidence of feeling non-accepted was low for I (3.8%) and F (1.7%) groups, high for N (16.4%) and average for L (7.9%).

iv) "I had little difficulty organising my life to meet all the deadlines and requirements" - Overall 38.4% felt this difficulty helped lead to their discontinuation. The N group in particular had this difficulty (55.7%) while L (25%), F (26.7%) and I (28.2%) groups experienced it to a much lesser extent.

v) "The level of difficulty of my courses was higher than I could cope with" - Overall 9.2% of discontinuers indicated this was the case. Not surprisingly the N group had the highest incidence (17.6%) while it was true to a much lesser extent for the L (5.1%) and I (3.8%) groups. The incidence for the F group was zero!

Although the N group had the highest proportion indicating agreement with this statement, the proportion who did so still represents less than one-fifth of this group. It seems, therefore, that the aspects in which the majority of them felt they were not coping lay in areas other than intellectual difficulty with course content. Evidence produced elsewhere suggests that the major difficulties were emotional and social.

vi) "I didn't see where the course I was studying could lead me" - Overall this was true for 25.9% of discontinuers. As might be expected it was particularly true for discontinuers with changed life goals (52.6%). There was average incidence for those who were not coping and low incidence for the I (9.0%) and F (6.7%) groups.

vii) "A University degree no longer seemed relevant to my future" - Overall agreement on this factor was 22.0%. Again the L group showed a relatively high incidence (50%) the N group an average incidence and F (1.7%) and I (3.8%) a low incidence.

viii) "I was too unsettled emotionally." - Overall 32.9% of discontinuers indicated this statement was true for them. The incidence was particularly high in the case of the N group (55.7%) and this should be contrasted to the relatively low proportion stating their courses were too difficult. The proportion of the I group agreeing with this statement differed little from the whole group average and it would seem, therefore, that the majority of this group suffered from physical rather than emotionally based illnesses. Lower proportions of the L (21.2%) and F (18.6%) groups agreed with this statement.

ix) "My family circumstances have changed since I began study this year" -Overall 19.3% of discontinuers reported changed family circumstances. This was particularly true for the F group (51.2%) and of low incidence for those with changed life goals (9.2%) or those who weren't coping (14.9%); the I group recorded average incidence.

x) "Nobody at university seemed to care about me personally" - Overall 12.1% of discontinuers noted this to be the case. There was a relatively high incidence of feeling of lack of care amongst the N group (23.7%) about average incidence for L and I groups and zero incidence for those in the F group.

xi) "Pressures of business, work etc. outside university"

- Overall 23.7% of discontinuers had this pressure. There was a relatively high incidence amongst the F group (34.5%), average amongst I and N groups and low for those with changed life goals (11.6%).

xii) "Financial difficulties" - Overall 21% of discontinuers indicated that financial difficulties were a factor in their discontinuations. It was to be expected that 96.4% of the F group noted this factor. That the proportion was not 100% is a reflection of the kinds of error to be expected in responses to questionnaires. The apparent error margin is nonetheless small. However, responses to this statement show that for small proportions of the other groups also, financial issues were subsidiary factors affecting discontinuation. The respective proportions were N, 17.1%; L, 12.8%; I, 11.6%.

xiii) "Other" - 31.0% of respondents also indicated that there were other difficulties which had led to their discontinuation. 40.0% of those who had marked 'other' as their major reason for discontinuation still felt their reasons undefined, while 35.9% of the I group also recorded other factors (the latter perhaps reflecting the lack of a directly illness-related item amongst the list presented).

i) *Reason and Intention to Return*

Overall 34.4% of discontinuers definitely intended to return to University in the next year, 27.3% were definitely returning sometime in the future, 30.4% said "perhaps" they would return and 7.8% replied they would "definitely not" be returning. Marked differences occurred between the various groups. 86% of the F group, 87% of the I and 70.1% of the O groups indicated a definite intention to return either sometime in the future or "next year", whereas 47.3% of the N and 52% of the L groups said they would either perhaps return or definitely not return. Individual peaks were that 66.2% of group I said they would return in the subsequent year while 13.2% of discontinuers with changed life goals said they would definitely not be returning.

j) *Reason and People with whom Discontinuation was Discussed*

The discontinuers showed considerable variation in their choice of people with whom to discuss their decisions. For instance, over two-thirds of the L group discussed their discontinuation with their parents whereas less than half the F group did do. Academic staff were most frequently chosen by the I group and least frequently chosen by students who were not coping, who most frequently saw the Student Counselling Service. There was no significant variation in the proportion of discontinuers who spoke to nobody.

k) *Reason and Happiness at University*

There were significant differences between the groups with respect to the degree of happiness experienced while at university. Close to 85% of the I, F and O groups described their time at university as most happy. Half the L group described their time as happy with a further quarter describing their time as most happy. Half the N group described their time as unhappy and a further 8% described it as most unhappy.

l) *Reason and Whether there was "anything which the University could have done which would have made it possible to continue your studies"*

37.1% of the F and O groups stated "yes" close to 28% of groups N and L and 18% of the I group also did so. In all groups, however, a minority felt that the University could have helped their position. Elsewhere in the report an analysis of student replies as to what the university could have done is presented. (See Section 5 and Appendix B).

m) *Reason and Marital Status*

Greater than 90% of N and L groups were single, close to 30% of I and F groups were married. This variation was no doubt associated with the age differences between these groups to which reference is made later in the report.

n) *Reason and Whether the Student Entered University in the Year Following Matriculation*

32% of discontinuers who entered in the year following matriculation discontinued because they were not coping, a percentage that is twice that for those who entered in subsequent years. This situation is reversed for financial and illness discontinuers, in which case twice the percentage were delayed entries. Also more students who entered in the year following matriculation discontinued for reasons of not coping than did those who entered in subsequent years.

2. DIFFERENCES BETWEEN STUDENTS WHO DISCONTINUED PRIOR TO THE BEGINNING OF SECOND TERM AND THOSE WHO DISCONTINUED AFTER THE BEGINNING OF SECOND TERM

This comparison was chosen in order to discover if there were any differences in responses between those students who would most likely be considered failures if they discontinued (second or third term discontinuers) and those who would most likely not be considered failures (1st term discontinuers) in accordance with university by-laws. The results are based on the 1973 sample only.

There were only three significant differences between the groups. A sign test ($P<.01$) showed that later discontinuers had consistently

higher (for 10 of 11 cases) percentages of "yes" responses to the question which asked students to mark any of 11 items which might have described situations which let to their discontinuation. The meaning of the result is not clear, though it could simply mean that those who discontinue later in the year needed a greater weight of contributing factors before they decided to discontinue than did earlier discontinuers. Also later discontinuers more frequently contacted the Careers and Appointment Service and the Counselling Service.

It is interesting to note that there was no difference between the two groups in their intention to return - 32% considered they would be returning in the year following their discontinuation. One might have expected that the increased failure rate amongst later discontinuers would somehow affect these plans as failure decreases chances of re-entrance to the University.

3. DIFFERENCES AMONGST DISCONTINUERS WHEN CATEGORISED ACCORDING TO SEX

53.7% of discontinuing respondents were male, 46.3% female. The majority of variables showed no sex difference - these include reason for discontinuation, happiness at university and whether there was anything the university could have done which would have made it possible for the discontinuers to continue their studies. The following

results show the significant sex differences.

a) *Sex and Factors Which Led to the Student's Discontinuation*

More males "had little interest in the subjects they were studying" while more females were"too unsettled emotionally" and found that "a university degree no longer seemed relevant to my future"

b) *Sex and Intention to Return*

66.6% of males intended to return to university either in the following year or in some other year, 56.2% of females had the same intention. 9.6% of females were "definitely not" intending to return to university compared with 6.1% of males in this category. See also "Year status and intention to return" as sex and year status interact for this variable.

c) *Sex and People with whom discontinuation was discussed*

Females more often discussed discontinuation with their parents, a friend and "some other person", while males more often spoke with academics, administrators or nobody at all. There was no difference between males and females in their frequency of contacting the Student Counselling Service, the Student Health Service or the Careers and Appointments Service.

d) *Sex and Marital Status*

19.7% of females were married compared with 9.8% of males.

e) *Sex and Whether the Discontinuer Entered University in the Year Following Matriculation or Not.*

8.5% of male discontinuers did not enter in the year following their matriculation whereas 17.3% of females did not enter at that time. This finding is probably related to marital status - the number of older married women embarking on university courses.

4. DIFFERENCES AMONGST DISCONTINUERS WHEN CATEGORISED ACCORDING TO WHETHER THEY WERE 1ST YEAR STUDENTS OR NOT

a) *Year Status and Residence*

61% of 1st year discontinuers lived with their parents compared with 37% of later year discontinuers. For rented accomodation the figures were reversed with 21% and 47% respectively. This finding is not unexpected and probably coincides with the proportion in the university as a whole.

b) *Year Status and Reason for Discontinuation*

Although this cross tabulation produced some significant differences between later years and 1st years the size of the differences

was not large. The differences were that later year students discontinued less often for financial reasons, more often because of illness, less often because of changed life goals and more often for 'other' reasons. There was barely any difference in the incidence of not coping.

c) *Year Status and Factors which Led to the Student's Discontinuation*

First years more often found that "the level of difficulty of my courses was higher than I could cope with", that "I didn't see where the course I was studying could lead me" and that "nobody at university seemed to care about me personally". Later year students more often felt the influence of "pressures of business, work, etc. outside university" and "other" influences.

d) *Year Status and Intention to Return*

69.5% of later year students intended to return to university either in the following year or in some other year while only 54.0% of 1st years had the same intention. 10.4% of 1st years indicated they would never return a figure twice that for later years (5.2%). First year females in particular were not intending to return or would only return "perhaps" (54.2%) compared with 1st year males (37.8%).

e) *Year Status and People with whom Discontinuation was Discussed*

1st year discontinuers more often discussed discontinuation with their parents and the Counselling Service. Later year discontinuers more often spoke with the Student Health Service, which fact is probably related to the finding that a higher proportion of later year students discontinue for reasons of illness.

f) *Year Status and Overall Happiness at University*

76.4% of later years were either happy or most happy at university, while 62.2% of 1st years felt likewise; 5.5% of 1st years felt most unhappy compared with 1.5% of later years.

COMPARISONS WITH REFERENCE GROUP

Earlier in this report it was pointed out that a number of questions used in the questionnaire had also been used in a study of Geography 1 students and that the responses of these students could be used for purposes of comparison with the responses of the discontinuing students.

The bulk of the students in the Geography study were in their first year at University. Therefore, for purposes of comparison only first year discontinuers were considered. There is no reason to believe that Geography students are representative of university students as a whole but it would require such an assumption if one were to compare the responses of the Geography students with the responses of all discontinuers. To overcome this problem and thereby make the comparison more meaningful only the responses of first year discontinuers from degree courses in Arts, Science, Economics and Education were considered, since student enrolments in Geography were confined to these courses. This decision meant that 187 discontinuing first year students and 154 first year students enrolled in Geography 1 in 1973 were considered for comparisons.

Two forms of analysis were adopted. First the responses of the first year discontinuers as a whole were compared with those of the reference groups. This simply involved comparison of two group means.

The method of planned comparisons was followed. However, it was considered that any difference between the discontinuers and the reference group may be related to the reason for discontinuation, and thus a second form of analysis was adopted which compared sub-groups of discontinuers, grouped according to their reasons for discontinuation, with the reference group. Those who discontinued for "other" reasons were such a diverse group that it did not seem meaningful to include them in the analysis. They were, therefore, omitted from consideration. There were 22 first year students who gave financial difficulties as their reason for discontinuation, 25 gave illness, 87 said they were not coping, and 53 said they had changed life goals. In all there were five groups involved in the comparisons, four who discontinued and one (Geography 1) which completed the first year.

The statistical procedure followed for the multiple group comparisons was analysis of variance with the significance of the differences among the means being assessed by the Scheffé method. In all cases the .05 level of significance was adopted.

Since the number of analyses performed is large, analysis of variance tables will not be presented in the reporting of results. Means only will be shown. Analyses were performed using S.P.S.S. computer programs available at the University of Sydney Computer Center.

Those who are interested in additional statistical details may consult the Counselling Service for the information they seek.

In reporting results the various groups are referred to under the following code: Discontinuers (whole group) D; Geography reference group, R; sub-groups discontinuing for financial reasons, F, illness, I, because not coping, N, and because life goals changed, L.

RESULTS

The first significant difference established between the D and the R groups was in age, the D group being older (Mean D, 20.14 years; Mean R, 18.42 years). Comparison of the sub-group means revealed that the size of this difference was chiefly affected by the age of those discontinuing because of financial difficulties. The mean age of this group was significantly higher than that for all other groups except those discontinuing through illness, which group in turn was older than both the L and R groups. (Mean F, 23.18 years; Mean I, 21.68 years; Mean N, 19.49 years; Mean L, 18.75 years).

It is not surprising that older students, probably because they are married and have family responsibilities and commitments, are more likely to be affected by financial difficulties than are younger students. It is interesting to speculate on why those discontinuing

through illness should be older than both continuing students and those who discontinued because of changed life goals. One certainly expects increasing health problems with increasing age but what sections of students would be likely to be affected? Two groups come to mind. An increasing number of married women are entering or re-entering university courses when they feel that family responsibilities permit them to do so. Numbers of older men attempt to complete degrees while remaining in full time employment. Since the University of Sydney does not cater well for students seeking to study part-time by evening study, this group if forced to fit in some day courses with their employment. It is possible that both these groups of students experience health problems as a result of the additional strain they experience.

Age does seem to have some bearing on the reasons why first year students discontinue. Generalizations do not explain individual cases, but on the evidence it appears reasonable to suggest that older students discontinued more for reasons outside their own personal control (financial difficulties and illness i.e. external reasons) whereas younger students discontinued for reasons related to their own personalities (not coping or changed life goals i.e. internal reasons).

The five groups were compared on time spent on travelling to university each day. There were no significant differences detected.

All other significant differences occurred in the responses to the questionnaire items. All questionnaire items provided for responses on a 4-point scale; these were scored from 0 to 3 and reported means fall within these scale ranges.

The first questionnaire item showing differences among the groups was the item, I feel distant and remote from my lecturers and tutors. Group F rated this item significantly lower than the N and R groups i.e. they feel less remote. There was no overall difference between the R and D groups. (Mean F, 0.83; Mean I, 1.58; Mean L, 1.48; Mean R, 1.70).

On the item I really like being a uni student, the reference group responses were significantly higher than those of the discontinuers (Mean R, 1.97; Mean D, 1.49). The difference is largely brought about by the low scores of the not coping group. (Mean 1.29). The other means were F, 1.68; I, 1.74; L, 1.64.

On the item, I study to no set plan, there was no difference between the D and R groups. However, within the discontinuers the F group

agreed with this statement significantly less than the L group. The group means were F, 1.11; I, 1.77; N, 1.98; L, 2.17; R, 1.81. It is not surprising that persons changing their life goals would be less organized about their study than others.

The next item stated that being a uni student conflicts with what others expect of me. All groups found little to agree on this statement but the level of agreement among the F group was higher than both N and L groups. For the F group the conflict probably lies with demands of employers and families. The respective means were: F, 0.94; I, 0.50; N, 0.29; R, 0.45.

There was no difference between the D and R groups on the item, I dislike attending lectures. However, the N group scored significantly higher (i.e. showed more dislike) than both the F and R groups. The group means for this item were: F, 0.47; I, 0.83; N, 1.29; L, 1.29; R, 0.67.

The next item, I think being a member of the academic staff here would be interesting and rewarding, reflects an involvement in the academic atmosphere of the university. The continuing students showed a significantly stronger agreement with this statement than did the discontinuers (Mean R, 1.81; Mean D, 1.30). The difference is mainly attributable to the lower scores of the N and L groups. (Respective means were: F, 1.78; I, 1.35; N, 1.23; L, 1.25).

The next item, I get satisfaction from studying, also reflects involvement in academic activities. There was no difference between the means of the R and D groups, but the F group responses were significantly higher (i.e. indicating more satisfaction) than both the N and L groups. (Mean F, 2.19; Mean N, 1.21; Mean L, 1.25).

There was a significant difference between the D and R groups on the next item, being a uni student clashes with doing other things I want to do. The continuing students less often felt in agreement with the statement (Mean R, 0.99; Mean D, 1.27). No sub-group differences were detected.

The next item sought information on an aspect of study behaviour. It read I review each day's notes within a week of taking them. Agreement with this statement was low for all groups, but interestingly it was significantly higher for the D than for the R group. (Mean R, 0.64; Mean D, 0.84). This difference was produced chiefly by the significant difference between the R and F groups, the latter being much more committed to reviewing their notes. The mean for the respective groups were: F, 1.4; I, 1.0; N, 0.72; L, 0.74.

Two items in the questionnaire, which sought information about respondents' reasons for being at university, revealed significant differences between the groups. On the item, I am clear about the reasons I am at University, the R group indicated stronger agreement with that state-

ment than did the discontinuers. (Mean R, 0.57; Mean D, 1.27; - on this item a high score means low agreement with the statement). Comparison of sub group means showed that the N and L groups were the least clear about their reasons for being at university. In the case of the L group they were not only less clear than the reference group but also less clear than the I group. On the other item, I think I am at uni for the wrong reasons, the discontinuers again expressed stronger agreement than did the reference group (Mean D, 1.62; Mean R, 2.50). Among the sub groups, the F group expressed lower agreement than did the N and L groups, while both the F and I groups were not significantly different from the R group.

The next item on which differences were detected stated, I am learning a lot through doing set work (essays, assignments, reports etc). The R group felt this to be true to a greater extent than the D group (Mean R, 0.72; Mean D, 1.39). This difference is attributable to the influence of the L and N sub groups. In addition to showing less agreement with the statement than the R group, the N group also differed significantly from both the F and I groups, while the L group differed significantly from the F group. The various means were F, 0.45; I, 1.00; N, 1.77; L, 1.31.

Two other items, both reflecting on students' personal comfort in the university, showed differences between the discontinuers and the

reference group of continuing students. The first of these items stated, When I am at Uni I feel lonely. Respective means for the two groups were R, 0.87; D, 1.46. (In this case a high score indicates agreement with the statement). When the responses of the sub groups are examined it is apparent that this difference is chiefly produced by the Not Coping group whose mean score on this item is significantly higher than all other groups. The mean scores for this item were: F, 0.95; I, 1.21; N, 1.91; L, 1.02. On the other item, I feel uncomfortable in lectures, the D group again showed stronger agreement than the R group (Mean D, 0.85; Mean R, 0.39). As with the previous item, the major contributor to this difference was produced by the N group, but on this occasion the I group, which did score high on the previous item, also was significantly different from the R and F groups. The N group was different from all groups with the exception of the I group. The respective means were: F, 0.30; I, 1.04; N, 1.16; L, 0.46.

There were differences between the D and R groups on the item, I feel uncomfortable in tutorials, (Mean D, 1.30; Mean R, 0.94) and on the item, I feel I really belong at uni (Mean D, 0.71; Mean R, 1.40). On the first item there were no sub group differences but on the second the N group was shown to score lower (i.e. to feel less belonging) than all other groups. The respective means were F, 1.21; I, 1.05; N, 0.32; L, 1.02.

On two other items the not coping group differed from other groups. More than all others, except the I group, they agreed with the statement, the buildings and lecture rooms I use seem new and strange (the respective group means were F, 0.21; I, 0.70; N, 1.02; L, 0.35; R, 0.46), while they felt overwhelmed by the university as a place more than the L group (Mean N, 1.28; L, 0.62).

Overall differences between the D and R groups were established on a further three items. The first of these read I discuss personal matters with other students at uni (Mean R, 0.95; Mean D, 0.72). On the second of these items, I speak to the person sitting next to me in tutorials they were R, 2.01; D, 1.45. On both the last two items the difference was attributable to the influence of the N group, which on the multiple group comparisons was the only sub group to score significantly lower than the reference group.

Finally there were two items relating to social behaviour on which differences were detected. The discontinuing students more often ate lunch alone than did the continuing students. (Mean R, 0.68 Mean D, 1.20). When the sub groups were compared it was discovered that the F, I and N groups all scored lower than both the R and L groups. The respective means were F, 1.60; I, 1.39; N, 1.44; L, 0.58. It has already been shown that the F and I groups were older than the others and their age may have been a barrier to their socialising.

In the case of the N group their inability to cope probably was partly related to social inadequacies. The L group were not distinguishable from the reference group on this variable.

The last item stated when I have lunch with other students I feel uncomfortable. Again the N group showed greatest discomfort but they differed significantly only from the L group which again showed the greatest comfort in this area. Respective means on this item were: F, 0.45; I, 0.43; N, 0.63; L, 0.21; R, 0.35.

SUMMARY

Discontinuing students have been shown to be different from continuing students in the same faculties on a number of variables. However, discontinuers do not form a homogeneous group and the decision to compare sub groups of discontinuers, grouped according to reason for discontinuation, has been justified by the outcomes. Some sub groups were very little different in their responses to the reference group while others showed marked differences. Two contrasting groups in this respect are those who discontinued through financial difficulties and those who were not coping. The F group were an older group but they did not differ from continuing students on more than a couple of variables and interestingly the differences usually showed them to be more involved in academic activities. For example, they felt less

remote from their lecturers than the reference group felt, and reviewed their notes more often than the reference group. The only other difference was that they tended to eat lunch alone more often than the reference group and a reason for this has already been suggested.

By contrast the not coping group differed on many variables not only from the reference group but also from the other discontinuation groups. Compared with the others they were more inclined to feel remote from lecturers, to dislike attending lectures, and to feel uncomfortable within them. They were less inclined to speak to persons next to them in lectures and tutorials, to feel that they belonged at university, and to believe they were learning from doing set work and to like being a university student. On the other hand they were more inclined to feel lonely, to find the buildings strange and to feel they were at university for the wrong reason.

Earlier in this section it was suggested that the groups of discontinuing students could be considered as constituting two kinds - those who discontinued for reasons external to themselves or beyond their control, e.g. financial difficulties and illness, and those who discontinued for reasons associated with their personality e.g. those who believed they were not coping and those who changed their life goals. This suggestion seems to be supported by the evidence presented in this section and will be explored further in the final section.

WHAT COULD THE UNIVERSITY HAVE DONE?

Respondents were asked the question "Is there anything which the University (or particular departments or sections of the University) could have done which would have made it possible for you to continue with your studies?" 30% (253) of all respondents indicated that the University could have done something to enable their continuation. From these 253 respondents a sample of 61 (approx 25%) were randomly taken. These 61 were analysed and the results are presented below.

Most frequently (10 occasions) comments were made about the impersonality of the university. The general tenor of the statements reflected a need for more individual attention, help and concern from both the academic and administrative staffs, and a desire to be treated as people not students or numbers. Smaller class sizes and less cell-like classrooms were also called for. A large proportion of the comments concerning impersonality came from students who discontinued because they were not coping.

Nine comments referred to a desire for a change in either course structure or substance. Increased options within courses were particularly desired so that courses would be more relevant to students' interests and aims.

Seven comments called for greater availability of child minding facilities.

An equal number referred to the difficulties of part time students. Typically the need for more evening lectures, evening and week-end facilities, and consideration of the problems of part time students were mentioned.

A further seven comments were directed towards the Administration of the University. These comments were diverse and included the desire for credit for partially completed years, more efficient communication of rules and regulations and fewer course transfer problems.

Six comments were examination oriented, either calling for the abolition of formal exams, a decrease in their weighting or a choice of assessment.

Five comments called for greater availability of financial assistance and a further five more for more vocationally or "life oriented" courses.

The remainder of responses tended to be idiosyncratic and were left uncategorised. For example, "not enough time off from on campus job".

The smallness of the frequencies and the variety of responses cited above should not be allowed to cloud the issue that almost one third of discontinuers believed that some action by the University could have enabled them to continue. In fact many of the concerns presented above reflect issues that the University is either acting on or is being pressed to act upon, the issue of examinations being a

particularly prominent example. The University has also been approached with regard to child-care centres and for greater financial assistance and it would seem that the above data lend some weight to the cases presented in these areas. Part time (evening) courses have become fewer and seem on the way out altogether. Perhaps more attention could be given to see that students are not disadvantaged because of this trend.

Of course the most frequently voiced complaint referred to "impersonality", a complaint which because of its generality is difficult to come to terms with. However, the fact that, for instance, 50.2% of discontinuers often or most of the time "felt distant and remote from my lecturers and tutors" and 43.1% often or most of the time thought that "most academic staff are unconcerned about how effectively they are teaching" gives some directions to a quest for understanding "impersonality" and dealing with it.

DISCUSSION

This survey set out to ascertain the factors contributing to student discontinuations at the University of Sydney. The results of the survey clearly demonstrate that discontinuers are not a homogenous group. Their experiences of university are different, their reasons for discontinuation are different as are their intentions following discontinuation. In fact, when divided into groups according to reason for discontinuation far more differences on other variables were established than was the case when respondents were divided according to sex or to year status. The few sex differences which did occur were consistent with expectations based on Counselling Service records. By and large the sex differences established were those known to exist among students as a whole and do not have any special bearing on discontinuation. For example, women students are more willing to discuss problems affecting their lives than are males and this no doubt reflects an unfortunate cultural outlook on behaviour expected of males. It is disturbing to learn that almost 16% of male discontinuers did not discuss their plans with anybody.

One interesting aspect of the survey was the finding that about two-thirds of respondents intended to return to university at some time. However, the earlier in the course a student discontinued the more doubts he had about returning. In fact 10% of first-year discontinuers

had no intentions of returning, the proportion of first-year females (15.2%) being higher still, while a further 39% of these females had considerable doubts about returning.

In an earlier section of this report it was pointed out that discontinuers could be divided into two groups - those who discontinued for reasons largely outside their own control and those who discontinued for reasons inherent in the persons themselves. It is now proposed to examine this suggestion further.

Persons who discontinued for reasons largely outside their control were chiefly those who discontinued through illness or for financial reasons. Responses of these two groups to the various items were seldom significantly different from each other but frequently were significantly different from the other groups though not greatly dissimilar from a reference group of continuing students. Both groups appeared highly motivated academically, felt that they were coping with their studies, were involved in their studies and seemed to be clear about their objectives. A very high proportion of both groups indicated they were very happy at university and had firm intentions to return. It is obviously disappointing for both groups of students that their studies had to be interrupted. However, since the reasons for interrupting studies seem to have been beyond their control it may fairly be said that there is little anyone could have

done about it. That may well be true in the case of those discontinuing through illness, but is not necessarily true for those who had financial difficulties.

This group are most interesting and are worthy of close attention. In the first place it is worth noting that the proportion of discontinuers giving financial difficulty as the reason for discontinuation was no different in 1974, when fees were abolished, than in 1973, the last year in which students paid fees. Counsellors have mostly taken the view that living costs provide greater difficulties for students than fees, and this view seems to be supported by the 1973-74 discontinuation figures. Financial assistance over and above relief from fee payment would be needed to help this group of students remain at university and the evidence produced from this survey suggests that such assistance might be a good investment. Such a highly motivated group with clear goals could be expected to have a high graduation rate (not one person in this group felt that the level of difficulty of his/her courses was more than he/she could cope with). It is important, therefore, that members of both academic and administrative staffs within the university be aware of financial assistance provisions available to students and that adequate publicity about financial aids be furnished to help students become more aware of the provisions available.

It is possible that the high degree of motivation and academic orientation displayed by this group of students may have contributed to

their difficulties. Their strong wish to pursue an academic goal may have persuaded them to embark on a program even if there were doubts about their financial security. The typical Australian "let's give it a go" attitude may have prevailed. In view of the fact that this group were older and therefore more likely to be married with possible family or housing commitments, the impact of a financial miscalculation would be more serious. Persons who advise or counsel such students at the time of their entry to university could be of considerable help if they both emphasised the need to ensure financial security before beginning a course and pointed out the existence of financial aid schemes to assist in emergencies.

The two groups of students who discontinued for intrapersonal reasons were the not coping group and those whose life goals had changed. Although these two groups were distinctly different from the other two groups, this does not mean that they were similar to each other. Whereas one group was clearly not coping in several respects, the other group whose life goals had changed, were basically capable of coping but were disappointed with their university experience. They were unable to commit themselves to their studies because of uncertainties about their goals or about why they were at the University. In some cases the University did not measure up to their expectations. However, as a group they did not feel socially cut off or feel threatened by their surroundings. The decision to discontinue in their case seems

to be a healthy adjustment to their predicament and a positive step towards a new direction. Since just over half this group did not intend to return to university their new directions obviously lay elsewhere; for the remainder they probably lay in different courses within the University.

The not coping group stood out from the others in the degree of personal discomfort, unhappiness and social isolation they experienced. They were the largest group, amounting to almost one-third of respondents. Emotional factors seemed to contribute much more to their inability to cope than did intellectual inadequacies, and it appears that many of them are the persons about whom much has been written - those who do not make the transition from school to university. We cannot ignore the finding that one-third of persons who discontinued in the year following their matriculation did so because they were not coping. Such persons may well have benefited from delaying their entry to university until they had acquired greater maturity and life experience. This is not to suggest that all students should take this step; the problem is one of identifying those at risk and, therefore, likely to benefit from a deferred entry.

It seems to us that when persons talk about discontinuers, usually by referring to them as "drop-outs" they convey the impression that all such students are not coping and that they somehow have not measured up to the tasks they undertook. At the outset of this report we

raised the question of whether or not it was necessarily a bad thing for a person to discontinue. The outcome of the study shows that for a sizeable proportion of students the decision to discontinue is forced upon them by factors over which they have little control, or is arrived at as a healthy readjustment in decision making. The important issue for the University is whether or not is could take steps to intervene in the case of those who either do not cope or get caught up in situational problems outside their control, in a manner which might enable these students to maintain their enrolments.

Section V presented suggestions made by discontinuing students about what actions they felt the university could have taken to help them. The groups offering the most suggestions were those who were not coping and those who discontinued for "other" reasons. For the latter group three main issues were raised. Improved child minding facilities were requested by several respondents while others wanted improved facilities for part-time studies. The third issue was course related in that several respondents felt their courses needed to be improved to make them more relevant to society. It is interesting that the first two of these issues have been raised by other bodies within the university over the past year. Both bear closer examination.

The group who were not coping at university asked for a reduction in class sizes and more individual attention from staff as a means of

reducing the impersonality they felt on the campus. In addition they wanted the assessment system improved as they clearly believed it contributed to distance they felt between staff and students. Again it should be noted that assessment in the university has been the subject of enquiry and debate recently and is an issue which could affect all students.

It seems to us that there are other actions which could be taken; particularly in view of the fact that 12% of respondents did not discuss with anybody their decisions to discontinue. The proportion in the group with financial difficulties was 10% and in the not coping group 13.4%. It is possible that some of these persons could have been helped if they had discussed their plans with an appropriate staff member. For example some may not have known about financial assistance schemes which could have helped them complete their year of study. Others may have been able to come to terms with their emotional difficulties. One way of ensuring that all discontinuing students have the opportunity to discuss their plans is to require them to obtain the signature of an appropriate staff member, for example a person in the Dean's office, on their change of enrolment form. There have been many examples of students who intended to discontinue, changing their minds after a discussion with a staff member gave them a new perspective on their situations. It would not require a major change in administrative procedure to ensure that all

potential discontinuers had the same opportunity, though some persons may object to such a step as being too paternalistic.

The pattern of responses given by the not coping group suggests that they might be identified by perceptive staff members, particularly those who teach in small groups. A friendly approach to all students is of course desirable, but a friendly interested approach to the student who seems socially isolated and ill at ease could make an important contribution to that student's adjustment at a crucial time in his university career.

It is clear that identifying students at risk is a fairly subjective procedure. If a reliable objective means of identification could be established then it would be possible to institute suitable intervention strategies. The authors of this report are now seeking to establish such a method based on the data available from this study. We hope to be able to formulate prediction equations and to test them on a new intake of students. Results of that investigation will be reported elsewhere in due course.

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APPENDIX A

The 1973 Questionnaire

QUESTIONNAIRE TO DISCONTINUING STUDENTS

Each year numbers of students discontinue their courses at university. The numbers involved are large and represent a wastage of talent, time and energy. Unfortunately there is no accurate information on the reasons why students discontinue and this questionnaire is designed to provide such information. Although your name is asked your answers will be treated confidentially and will be seen only by members of the Student Counselling Service conducting the enquiry. It is important to know respondents' names so that other information such as H.S.C. results, already on university records, can be related to questionnaire responses.

Read the questionnaire through first then please answer it frankly and fully. Unless otherwise indicated place a cross (X) in the appropriate box or boxes.

NAME: _____

8. AGE: _____ 10. SEX: _____ 11. FACULTY: _____

13. DATE OF DISCONTINUATION: _____

14. Year in which you took your H.S.C.: _____

16. During my attendance at university I was living

a) at home with parents ☐

b) in private board ☐

c) in a university college ☐

d) in a hostel ☐

e) in a rented flat or house ☐

f) other _____ ☐
(specify)

17. If you were not living at home with parents indicate whether

a) Your parents' home is in Sydney ☐

b) Your parents' home is outside Sydney ☐

18. Indicate the total time you spent travelling to and from the university each day. _____

21. Indicate if other members of your immediate family have attended a university.

My Father ☐

My Mother ☐

A brother or sister ☐

No other members of my family ☐

22. Which year of attendance at university study are you in?

First ☐

Second ☐

Third or later ☐

23. Is the course from which you have just discontinued the course you listed as your first preference in your MUAC application?

Yes ☐

No ☐

24. Which one of the following best describes the reason for your discontinuation?

a) It is not possible financially for me to continue ☐

b) Illness prevents me from continuing ☐

c) I am not coping (whether socially, emotionally or academically) with being at university ☐

d) My life goals have changed ☐

e) Other _____ ☐

(please specify)

25. Things which have led to this situation include (check as many as apply).

a) I have little interest in the subjects I am studying ☐

b) I am disappointed with the intellectual atmosphere at university ☐

c) I do not feel accepted by other students ☐

d) I have difficulty organizing my life to meet all the deadlines and requirements ☐

e) The level of difficulty of my courses is higher than I can cope with ☐

f) I don't see where the course I'm studying can lead me ☐

g) A university degree no longer seems relevant to my future ☐

h) I am too unsettled emotionally ☐

i) My family circumstances have changed since I began study this year ☐

j) Nobody at university seems to care about me personally ☐

k Other _____ ☐

(please specify)

26. Is it your present intention to return to university?

Definitely next year ☐

Yes, at some time in the future ☐

Perhaps ☐

Definitely not ☐

27. Before deciding to discontinue my course I discussed my situation with (check as many as apply)

a) My parents ☐

b) A member of the Academic staff ☐

c) A student counsellor ☐

d) A Student Health Service physician ☐

e) An officer of the Appointments Board ☐

f) A member of the Administrative staff ☐

g) A friend ☐

h) Some other person _____ (Specify) ☐

i) Nobody ☐

29. The time I have spent at university has been

Most happy ☐

Happy ☐

Unhappy ☐

Most Unhappy ☐

Please answer the following questions about yourself and your university experience as frankly as you can by putting a cross(X) in the box that is nearest to your OWN point of view. Don't spend too much time on any one question; your first impression is usually best. There are no right or wrong answers.

	Rarely	Occasionally	Often	Most of the time
31. I feel distant and remote from my lecturers and tutors.	☐	☐	☐	☐
32. Whenever I think about it I really like being a uni. student	☐	☐	☐	☐
33. I study to no set plan.	☐	☐	☐	☐
34. For me, being a uni. student conflicts with what other people expect of me.	☐	☐	☐	☐
35. If there is something I want to know I ask questions of lecturers or tutors	☐	☐	☐	☐
36. I think most academic staff are unconcerned about how effectively they are teaching.	☐	☐	☐	☐
37. I dislike attending lectures.	☐	☐	☐	☐
38. I think being a member of the academic staff here would be interesting and rewarding	☐	☐	☐	☐
39. I get satisfaction from studying.	☐	☐	☐	☐
40. Being a uni. student clashes with doing other things I want to do.	☐	☐	☐	☐
41. I leave doing essays, assignments reports etc. to the last minute.	☐	☐	☐	☐

		Rarely	Occasionally	Often	Most of the time
42.	I review each day's notes within a week of taking them.	☐	☐	☐	☐
43.	When I am at uni. I enjoy just being around the place.	☐	☐	☐	☐
44.	I spend as much time studying as I think I need to.	☐	☐	☐	☐

		True	More true than false	More false than true	False
45.	I think most people look down on uni. students	☐	☐	☐	☐
46.	I am clear about the reasons I am at uni.	☐	☐	☐	☐
47.	I tend to study only those things that are essential.	☐	☐	☐	☐
48.	I am getting pleasure from involvement in social or recreational activities at uni.	☐	☐	☐	☐
49.	I think I am at uni. for the wrong reasons	☐	☐	☐	☐
50.	I am learning a lot through doing set work (essays, assignments, reports etc).	☐	☐	☐	☐
51.	I like to learn things just for their own sake.	☐	☐	☐	☐

	Rarely	Occasionally	Often	Most of the time
52. When I am at uni. I feel lonely.	☐	☐	☐	☐
53. I feel uncomfortable in lectures.	☐	☐	☐	☐
54. I feel uncomfortable in tutorials	☐	☐	☐	☐
55. I feel I really belong at uni.	☐	☐	☐	☐
56. The buildings and lecture rooms I use seem new and strange.	☐	☐	☐	☐
57. I feel overwhelmed by the university as a place.	☐	☐	☐	☐
58. I discuss study matters with other students at uni.	☐	☐	☐	☐
59. I discuss personal matters with other students at uni.	☐	☐	☐	☐
60. I speak to the person sitting next to me in lectures.	☐	☐	☐	☐
61. I speak to the person sitting next to me in tutorials	☐	☐	☐	☐
62. I eat lunch alone	☐	☐	☐	☐
63. When I have lunch with other students I feel uncomfortable.	☐	☐	☐	☐

64. Is there anything which the university (or particular departments or sections of the university) could have done which would have made it possible for you to continue with your studies?

YES ☐ NO ☐

If so, please specify: _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

ADDITIONS AND CHANGES MADE FOR THE 1974 QUESTIONNAIRE.

For 1974 some of the preceding questions were changed either in tense or by addition. An example of the change in tense is 1973 - "I eat lunch alone", 1974 - "I ate lunch alone".

The following questions were added in 1974:

- MARITAL STATUS: _____

- ENROLMENT STATUS: Full time ☐
  Part time ☐

- Did you enter University in the year following Matriculation?

  Yes ☐ No ☐

- If not, how did you spend the intervening years?

  _____

  _____

  _____

- What preference was your enrolled course on your University application?

  (circle answer) 1st 2 3 4 5 6 7 8th

  If your enrolled course was not your first preference, what course was? _____

- At the time that I discontinued I was living

  f) In my/our own home ☐

- Things which have led to this situation include:

  k) Pressure of business, work, etc. outside university ☐

  l) Financial difficulties ☐

- Before deciding to discontinue my course I discussed my situation with:

  h) My husband/wife ☐

- If you wish to elaborate further, you may respond in your own words to any or all of the following questions. (If insufficient space, please attach a sheet of paper.)

a) Why did you come to the university?

_____

_____

b) What were your expectations of university life?

_____

_____

c) What has your university experience meant to you?

_____

_____

d) What are your present feelings about the university?

_____

_____

e) Any other comments?

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APPENDIX B

VERBATIM RESPONSES

Respondents were given the opportunity to respond to a number of open-ended questions. Selected responses are reported in this Appendix, verbatim and without comment. The responses have been selected both to illustrate the wide range of comments made and to provide a more personal touch to the survey than the previous analyses could provide.

What has your university experience meant to you?

-That exams were paramount - none of the students I met seemed to be able to relax - as they were all worried about forth-coming exams.

-I've had a really great time, but I wont be sorry when I leave.

-I think I have grown up - as I have spent a lot of time alone, and was forced to make new friends.

-Its useless academically - even hindered my chance of getting many jobs now. I did however make one friend.

-Glad of it - made me realise what I didn't want. Met some nice people.

-I'm less idealistic perhaps, less responsive to a lot of people. I realise though that this is a fault within me personally.

-That I'm very insignificant and unimportant to many people, just one of the big crowd that attends uni.

-A waste of time and money.

-A good experience I treasure very much.

-My values have changed. I cannot put effort into something meaningless and of no value.

-An interesting experience, pleased I attended uni. even for a short time. In retrospect, it was a glamour situation.

-A new set of values and broader horizons.

-Shown lack of individuality and lack of personality a person has in such an institution.

-I feel slightly more self-confident, maybe a little more mature. For some reason it seems important; an experience worthwhile.

-It has made me more eager to further my education - but when my child goes to school.

-It was rather frightening, no one to encourage you.

-It has allowed me to recognise and contrast my emotional state by its availability of the counselling unit. It has made me realise that my life goal is not material. This realisation occurred during my term not because of it.

What are your present feelings about the university?

-I still love and enjoy researching, therefore, I feel that uni. is the most beautiful place.

-That it could be a better place if certain lecturers and tutors placed more emphasis on helping students rather then showing contempt.

-A place where someone of intelligence and maturity can gain and learn anything he wants.

-Would only return for the sake of interest and only if there were no exams.

-It is too large and rather conservative. Would prefer to know lecturers and tutors better.

-It is not so all important, as people like to make out. There's too much emphasis placed on the fact of getting into uni. and not on what you are going to do at uni. itself.

-I would never return to uni. I do not approve of the methods of "lecturing" as such. Too impersonal an attitude between staff and students.

-A good place to get educated and surely a prestige place to be for young people.

-Kids have to go through courses of 3 to 6 years in which time they

generally learn very little and have to work hard on worthless crap just for the sake of testing them. All of this to get a degree and letters, this is not how it should be!

-That it usually kills any love you have for a subject which it teaches, it has no real educational ideas and is worse than school as far as spoon feeding, boring presentation etc. It is an incredibly lonely place for some people. Impression of middle class affluence and little else.

-Uni. is a unique situation, not a realistic situation, stunts social maturity. Should be regarded more as a place of learning.

-Low, too much emphasis on academic side instead of practical side.

-In high school I would have been shocked at anyone who had the chance to go to uni. and did not - now, it wouldn't shock me at all.

-Not helpful to part-time students.

-Not advanced enough in teaching methods etc. as necessary.

-I was pleased I tried and got it out of my system, I found I didn't really "fit in".

Any other comments?

-It seems that individuals are required to make many concessions to the administration; a situation which from my experience is rarely reciprocated.

-I could quote countless examples of how the breakdown in rapport, between students and staff, has led to hostile feelings about the place. Add to this anxieties about exams and you have a beautiful situation. The idea that if you make the lectures bad enough the student will go off and want to find out for himself sounds great for the resilient individual, but my experience of 8 years in industry has shown me that team-work effort always created a happier atmosphere and more positive results. I also feel that something should be done about the exam system; too much emphasis placed on a few anxiety provoking hours where the student is at his weakest. In my case I feel I could have adjusted to uni. life more readily if there was less tension of this kind.

-Next year I will commence an Arts Diploma Course at Randwick Tech. I have nothing against uni. I am one of those people who should never have gone to uni. in the first place. I have known this for years but I thought that I might be able to settle in - I didn't.

-I was emotionally unprepared for uni. life and had I worked for a year I feel so much more could have been gained.

-I am now more settled, happier - away from the big smoke; out mucking around animals, and trees, and people - out in the country at Ag. College.

-Unrealistic views on importance of child care facilities when an increase in number of students with children is occurring.....
a number of female students discontinuing in later years.

-Although I may enrol in another course, Arts gave me a general informative education. My tutors were an ill-assorted group on the whole. Honestly I consider some were there for the money and not the sense of their responsibility towards the students. I didn't expect to be spoon-fed but many lacked the sensitivity, perception and enthusiasm that I met within my high school teachers.

-This questionnaire annoyed me. You have a strongly bureaucratic, steeply hierarchical,rigid unmoving education machine here, and you're asking people why they left so you can put oil in the right places, make slight modification, so you can squeeze more and more people through. God, 9/10ths of the people here should leave, all those engineers and teachers spending 3-4 years learning absolutely nothing except how to use formulae and pass exams, with damn fools like you nodding your heads with approval (until they start asking for less of the boring, repetitive, time consuming, routine, mechanical work, which "keeps them off the street", so that they don't really learn much but they get a degree - AND THAT'S ALL THAT BLOODY WELL COUNTS!). You should damn well conduct surveys of all those people doing thesis subjects like, "The influence of Jac(illegible) Eschatology on Dante's Writings" or "The Stratigraphy, Palaeontology and Palaeoecology, of the Rosyth Limestone, Central N.S.W." or amongst my Dip Ed. friends who have admitted quite freely they know practically nothing about the subject they supposedly studied for three years (especially in Science). Christ, the freaks are the people who get through not us who drop out.